

THE CITY RECORD

≈ March 21, 1879 ≈

Homestead Problems

ED. DEMOCRAT:

I will attempt to give you something of an idea of the trials and tribulations attendant upon gaining and living on a homestead, so graciously given us old soldiers by the Government. As a class, old soldiers are men who are completely broken down by wounds and disease contracted while in the army and but few of them are able to perform more than half a days work at a time; and by having been absent from their farms and families in the late rebellion, have become very much reduced in circumstances, while citizens, or those who stayed at home and accumulated wealth and bodily strength, enjoy the same privileges as the old soldier, with these exceptions: an old soldier is allowed to deduct from the time required to remain on his homestead (five years) the time he was in the service, in addition he can hold 160 acres. But this very advantage, so called, actually places him in a worse position than the citizen.

In the first place, the soldier has to go through all the red tape consequent at the land office, pay the same entry fee, the same for witnesses as the citizen. And then take up his line of march "twenty miles away," you will know him to be an old soldier by his haversack and old canteen, and by the hitch in his gait, where he must commence falling the heaving timber, preparatory to cultivating, and building a house, the dimensions in accordance with the whims of the keeper of the king's seal at the land office. Often before this his scanty means are exhausted, starvation is staring him in the face. As there is no chance to forage on the enemy he must strike out for a land where he can get supplies. The next question arises, how am I to keep my homestead from the encroachment of land-sharks in my absence. There is no escape or redress in case you are advertised; you can save your homestead, provided you can command money enough (40 or 50 dollars) much more than many old soldier

can raise, aside from supporting his family. The evidence you produce is sufficient to save your homestead, but where's your redress for your trouble and expense. This process maybe gone through with until you are completely used up, and in despair give up your gift from the Government. Then these sharpers will throw the claim out of market and sell his chance for a round sum. Now let us see wherein the soldiers is benefitted. Old soldiers generally can "prove up" in two or three years, when his land is subject to taxation, while his improvements are taxed from the very first. When new counties and townships are being formed, money raised for public buildings, officers to be paid enormous salaries – by the time the citizen proves up and is required to pay taxes, the old soldier has paid in tax and other expenses, more than enough to have bought the land at first cost, and infinitely at less trouble of mind and body. If he should not survive under all of this, his widow and children must go through another bleeding process. But we have one blessing, that our Creator gave us good soil and a healthy climate and plenty of excellent timber.

Those the ghouls of civilization cannot take from us. We are asked to represent the case and petition. What will it avail us to petition to the devil's blackguard to do God's work. Lawyers will not enact laws that will clash with their own interest. As long as there are old soldiers in the land they are meat for their crops unless protected by some healthy law. It seems as if all living things were created for the sole purpose of preying upon each other. The pleasure arising from eating is much greater than the pain of being eaten.

OGAMA¹

1 There was a writer in the old Petoskey newspapers that signed his name "Ogama." We do not know if it was a generic term similar to "Anonymous" or if this was a regular contributor who wrote under this assumed name.



Dismounted Parade of the 7th New York Cavalry—1862
From the National Archives